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# There Is No Such Thing as "the Economy". Economic Phenomena Analysed from a Field-Theoretical Perspective<sup>1</sup>

*Christian Schmidt-Wellenburg & Frédéric Lebaron\**

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**Abstract:** »'Die Ökonomie' gibt es nicht! Zur Analyse ökonomischer Phänomene aus feldtheoretischer Perspektive«. This introductory essay to the HSR Special Issue "Economists, Politics, and Society" argues for a strong field-theoretical programme inspired by Pierre Bourdieu to research economic life as an integral part of different social forms. Its main aim is threefold. First, we spell out the very distinct Durkheimian legacy in Bourdieu's thinking and the way he applies it in researching economic phenomena. Without this background, much of what is actually part of how Bourdieu analysed economic aspects of social life would be overlooked or reduced to mere economic sociology. Second, we sketch the main theoretical concepts and heuristics used to analyse economic life from a field perspective. Third, we focus on practical methodological issues of field-analytical research into economic phenomena. We conclude with a short summary of the basic characteristics of this approach and discuss the main insights provided by the contributions to this special issue.

**Keywords:** Economic sociology, field, Bourdieu, methodology, discourse, domination, state, economy.

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<sup>1</sup> The expression "There is no such thing as ..." has been frequently used in economic textbooks in recent years in the form of "There is no such thing as a free lunch" to describe the universal law of opportunity costs (see e.g., Mankiw 2007, 4). This idea even resonates in the often cited Margaret Thatcher quote taken from an interview she gave to Women's Own magazine, October 31, 1987: "And, you know, there is no such thing as society. There are individual men and women, and there are families. And no government can do anything except through people, and people must look to themselves first." It is exactly against this ahistorical and asocial notion of universal laws of economic behaviour that Bourdieu's sociology is directed, addressing the tendency to naturalise social facts as part of observed phenomena. The expression itself is of unknown origin but central to the science-fiction novel *The Moon Is a Harsh Mistress* by Robert Heinlein, published in 1966.

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## 1. Introduction

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This HSR Special Issue on economists, politics, and society joins together contributions from researchers investigating a wide spectrum of economic phenomena from a field-theoretical perspective. They draw their methodological inspiration from a field-analytical toolbox well stocked with ideas and instruments developed especially by Pierre Bourdieu and his colleagues at the *Centre de sociologie européenne* (which became *Centre de sociologie de l'éducation et de la culture* after 1968, and again *Centre de sociologie européenne* at the end of the 1990s), as well as by Brigitte Le Roux, Henry Rouanet and other mathematicians working in the field of Geometric Data Analysis (GDA) following Jean-Paul Benzécri's tradition. Over time, Bourdieu and many of the researchers collaborating with him<sup>2</sup> have investigated various aspects of economic life, its practices and reasoning, using and improving these tools.

Bourdieu has always been engaged in economic sociology, which he first called "economic anthropology" (Bourdieu 2017), starting in the 1950s with research conducted in Algeria on the different time structures inherent to traditional and modern societies and their deep influence on the diverging forms of rationality linked to economic behaviour (Bourdieu et al. 1963; Bourdieu 1979 [1977]), right up to one of his last research projects on changes in the French world of literary publishing houses (Bourdieu 2008 [1999]). Right from the start, Bourdieu's way of analysing economic phenomena has made it difficult for die-hard economic sociologists to spot and exploit the rich insights his sociology has to offer to this area of investigation, because his sociological imagination is never restricted just to the realm of 'the economy' (Garcia-Parpet 2014; Swedberg 2011). Instead, it aims to understand economic behaviour as a social practice at the heart of and tightly interwoven with many other social processes, which in a sense is in direct line with Durkheim's conception of economic sociology (Steiner 2005).

Taking this into account, the main aim of this introductory essay is three-fold. First, we will spell out this very distinct Durkheimian legacy in Bourdieu's thinking and the way he applies it in researching economic phenomena (2). Without this background knowledge, much of what is actually part of how Bourdieu analysed economic aspects of social life is overlooked or reduced to mere economic sociology. Such a reductive stance would miss out on valuable insights and sources that can be used to construct a strong field-theoretical programme to analyse economic life as an integral part of different social

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<sup>2</sup> We can mention here, without claiming to be exhaustive, direct collaborators such as Abdelmalek Sayad, Luc Boltanski, Jean-Claude Chamboredon, Monique de Saint-Martin, Rosine Christin, and Salah Bouhedja, as well as parallel work since the 1970s by Christian Baudelot and Roger Establet and, in the 1990s, research by Marie-France Garcia, Johan Heilbron, Odile Henry, Frédéric Lebaron, Julien Duval, and François Denord.

forms. Second, we will sketch the main dimensions of such a strong field-theoretical programme to analyse economic life (3). Third, we will focus on practical methodological issues of field-analytical research into economic phenomena (4). We will conclude with a short summary of the main characteristics of this field-theoretical programme of economic sociology, and by discussing the main insights at the heart of the contributions to this special issue (5).

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## 2. Bourdieusian Economic Sociology: A Durkheimian Legacy

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As Bourdieu has pointed out in *The Social Conditions of the International Circulation of Ideas* (1999 [1990]), one runs the risk of misapprehension when reading and interpreting scientific work without taking into account the context of its production. This also applies to Bourdieu's own work and especially to his economic anthropology so deeply rooted in the French philosophical and sociological tradition. In Bourdieu, one finds the not-all-too distant echoes of the 'basic' projects of Durkheim, Mauss, Simiand, and Halbwachs. Whereas Durkheim, Mauss, and Halbwachs are well-known throughout global sociology for their contributions to social theory, this is not the case for their engagement with economic sociology and for Simiand's sociology in general.<sup>3</sup> Hence, to be able to fully appreciate what Bourdieu's economic anthropology can contribute to the study of economic phenomena, we start by outlining the legacy of Durkheimian economic sociology before turning to Bourdieu's own conception of the social embeddedness of economic reality.

### 2.1 Durkheimian Economic Sociology: A Forgotten Legacy?

The expression "economic sociology" was explicitly used by the Durkheimians at the very beginning of *L'Année sociologique*, and a large proportion of the articles published in the journal were classified under the heading "economic sociology." At the beginning of the 20th century, Simiand, Halbwachs, Mauss, and others developed various critical and empirical works on economic phenomena, read a large part of the world's scientific production in economics, economic history, and economic anthropology, and actively contributed to the debates (Steiner 1999).

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<sup>3</sup> Since none of their work in economic sociology has yet been translated into English, there is hardly any reception beyond the French context. In the *Handbook of Economic Sociology* edited by Neil J. Smelser and Richard Swedberg (2005), we find for example a straightforward reconstruction of Durkheim's economic sociology written by Swedberg, but his empirical works are only considered as secondary 'applications' and Simiand, Halbwachs, and Mauss are only referred to as Durkheim's "students."

Refusing to accept the reduction of economic behaviour to unconstrained (“free”) rational choice, Durkheimians instead emphasise the social context of economic actions as key to understanding these actions (Steiner 2005). They see structural conditions as the appropriate level on which to analyse the logic of economic processes, understanding social conditions as synonymous with the idea of *constraining collective representations* that frame individual actions (and are closely linked to the existence of institutions, which are themselves defined in terms of collective beliefs). For them, economic facts are “des choses, en apparence essentiellement objectives, indépendantes, semble-t-il, de l’opinion” (Durkheim 1975 [1908], 220), collective beliefs, ontologically and in their genesis related to religious faith. Here, we can notice a link to the German historical and sociological economic traditions (Weber 1988 [1915-16]; Sombart 1987 [1902]), which emphasises the relation between economic dispositions or practices and religious faith. There seems to be a typical European “economic sociology” issue that distinguishes economic sociology of a Durkheimian legacy from “new economic sociology” rooted in the Anglo-American tradition.

The Durkheimians propose what we can call a “strong programme” for economic sociology (Steiner 2005), in the sense that they want to *annex* economic explanation to economic sociology, which does not mean that they refuse any specific kind of explanation for economic phenomena. If this explanation is “specific,” it is in no case “a-sociological,” which means that it could not be produced without any reference to collective beliefs. Beliefs are socially produced, which implies that economics must be grounded in a general social psychology and that its mathematical formalisation must respect the collective nature of economic processes, which is not the case in neo-classical theory.

Durkheimian economic sociology provides an original conception of methodology and scientific explanation, especially compared to the leading neo-classical economics, but also compared to the current ‘mainstream’ (if there is any) of today’s “new economic sociology.” It is this specific context in which Bourdieusian economic sociology must be understood as focusing on the symbolic embeddedness of economic behaviour within more general social struggles, trying to understand the workings and to reconstruct the socio-historical genesis of a very specific ‘practical reason’ in light of a “a general theory of the economy of practices” (Bourdieu 1998, 93) – in other words, a relaunched ‘strong programme’ of economic sociology.

## 2.2. Bourdieu: Symbolic Embeddedness of Economic Reality

The Durkheimian tradition can be seen to surface in Bourdieu’s work on economic phenomena in at least two instances. First, Bourdieu always stresses symbolic aspects of economic life, and second, he elaborates an original anthropological critique of the dominant economic theory (that is to say, the neo-

classical theory), which he puts at the centre of his theoretical construction and scientific method, especially through a dispositional definition of action.

Bourdieu considers the economic order as a symbolic order. We can speak of an “economic” order, because a specific kind of social belief and interest has become autonomous from social reality (autonomisation has to be seen in relation to Polanyi’s disembeddedness, Polanyi 2001 [1944]), leading social agents to refer more and more to “economic” criteria and to leave aside other kinds of social criteria, at least in some parts of their practice (for a persuasive account, see Bourdieu 2017). The invention of a particular *illusio* (related to investment in a game and also libido, Bourdieu 1998) is at the origin of the existence of an autonomous economic order that is the result of an historical differentiation and expansion process. The law of the economic field “which has been elaborated by utilitarian philosophers [is] ‘business is business’” (Bourdieu 1998, 83). This economic perception of the world tends to dominate the entirety of social life, although it is limited by the existence of other fields (e.g., religion, bureaucracy, cultural production), which constitute small islands of symbolic resistance to the empire of economic logic.

This argument has its roots in Bourdieu’s “Algerian period” and in his analysis of the construction of a particular capitalist *cosmos* (Bourdieu et al. 1963; Bourdieu 1979 [1977]). In his works on Algeria, Bourdieu pointed out the existence of an “anti-economic” behaviour (from a “rational,” “modern” point of view) rooted in “traditional” dispositions, for which calculation, anticipation and also accumulation were not really defined or systematically constituted as legitimate practices, but on the contrary were inhibited by the symbolic conditions. The systematic introduction of money contributed to generalising and intensifying exchange and the related development of a “capitalist mind,” producing the *economic illusio* as an outcome of this “rationalisation” process in larger and larger aspects of daily life and institutions.

Economic domination, essentially analysed as “exploitation” in the Marxist tradition, is considered by Bourdieu as a particular case of symbolic domination (Bourdieu 1989). In his conception of domination, the dominated actively participate in their domination: they perceive the world through the eyes of the dominants, and their behaviour is profoundly determined by the relation of domination in which they take part (Bourdieu 2002). Bourdieu interprets the word “paternalism” used in the 1960s-1970s for certain kinds of management as a way to disqualify a traditional relation of domination, comparable to the subordination of servants to their masters (still important in many sectors of the economy, like small trade and also inside the domestic space). He also describes the decline of groups such as the little farmers from the region of Béarn as the result of their incapacity to adopt the dispositions (including matrimonial strategies) necessary to compete in a more global market:

The socially exalted relationship between brothers can, [...] in [the case of] Béarn, serve as a mask and a justification for economic exploitation, with a

younger brother often being an acknowledged ‘unpaid servant,’ often condemned to celibacy. (Bourdieu 1990, 16)

In the “modern” economy, the relations of domination are much more formal (they are, for example, developed through the imposition of certain types of labour contracts), rationalised (through the existence of formal levels of hierarchy, “professionalisation,” careers, etc.), and legitimised with the help of science (especially economics and management). The authority seems far from direct command as in the military model, because most of the employees are involved in the game, accepting the general *illusio* of the economic field, and the “positive” side of work (which is always double faced: domination and investment). But they face a multiplicity of new forms of domination linked with the neo-liberal order (c.f. Boltanski and Chiapello 2007; Schmidt-Wellenburg 2013a).

From such a symbolic viewpoint, economic struggles cannot simply be reduced to distribution conflicts over added value. On the contrary, the existence of classes is the product of a symbolic unification taking place on the basis of similar existence conditions inside larger social spaces (Bourdieu 1984, 1987). The creation of institutions (unions, professional organisations, parties, etc.), which *represent* groups, is a way for these groups to exist in the public sphere, not only through claims but also through symbolic representations, discourses, strategies, institutions. This process of *representation* of collective interests is a determining component of economies where “industrial relations” have been institutionalised, especially after the Second World War through organs such as the *Commissariat général du plan* in France, collective bargaining systems, social security systems, etc. These institutions are the outcome of symbolic struggles which result in the establishment of stable “consensus,” a consensus that is all the same subject to further struggle and can be broken, as the history of western Keynesian welfare states, the “Washington Consensus” and current neoliberalism shows (Hall 1986; Dezalay and Garth 2002; Schmidt-Wellenburg 2017b).

Economic reality has, finally and consequently, to be understood as *discursively* embedded (distinguished from the issue of performativity) and hence also consisting of symbolic practices mobilising discourses in various ways and in various sectors of the social space (Temmar, Angermüller and Lebaron 2013; Longuet and Pereira 2015; Légé and Marques-Pereira 2016; Guilbert and Lebaron 2017). Bourdieu has developed various insights in this direction, especially in his books *Ce que parler veut dire* (1982; extended English version Bourdieu 1991), which can now be operationalised using a large set of theoretical and methodological tools.

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### 3. A Field-Theoretical Perspective for Analysing 'The Economy'

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Any analysis of economic behaviour that takes its starting point from Bourdieu's understanding of economic reality as symbolically embedded can no longer rely on mere utility-maximising reasoning alone as the essence of economic practices, but has to take into account much more: socialised agents, contracts, legal security, property rights, labels and certifications, technical knowledge, machines, logistics and means of transportation, to name but a few (Bourdieu 2017). All these different prerequisites, and there are many more one could think of, vary throughout history and from one social context to another and should be analysed as *forms of knowledge* from two perspectives. On the one hand, "practical knowledge" is crucial to understand how economic practices work in everyday life and why agents engage in certain economic behaviour (3.1). On the other hand, there are various forms of objectified economic knowledge, often closely linked with "practical knowledge" and economic agents and structuring their engagement, shaped differently than through economic field contexts. As we will argue, in our analysis of the symbolic embeddedness of economic behaviour we need to take into account the production of economic knowledge in at least three other areas: economics as an academic field (3.2), in policy discourse and state-bureaucracies (3.3), and the field of power (3.4).

Agents engaging in economic practices have to be understood as being multi-positioned in different fields and drawing their symbolic capital and discursive ability to produce statements on economic issues from different contexts (Schmidt-Wellenburg 2017a). This opens up the possibility for agents to 'tactically' engage in the production of knowledge: it is here that today's perception of the social as being dominated by the economy, of societies as economic units competing to survive and of politics as the basic tool with which to optimise their functioning by reforming their social model (*modèle social*, *Gesellschaftsmodell*) according to cost-benefit efficiency, is produced (Lebaron 2013; see also Duval 2007).

#### 3.1 The Social Embeddedness of Economic Practices

Economic behaviour depends on knowledgeable agents who are able to get involved in practices of producing goods, organising production in firms, exchanging goods in markets, and buying and consuming goods in the context of firms or households. Agents seen as specialists in these areas are characterised as "practicing professionals" and distinguished from and by others due to their specific mastery of certain economic tasks. As Bourdieu has shown in his study of the housing market, this kind of practical mastery functions as a form of symbolic power creating asymmetric relationships with consumers (Bourdieu 2005). The



same holds true in the case of production processes, where the mastery is linked to formal qualifications, is distinguished by the background of agents' formation, e.g., managerial, economic, or judicial formation, and creates inner- and intra-organisational hierarchies. The distinct logics and abilities needed to engage in economic practice are historically contingent and by no means a universal human trait, but are shaped rather by processes distinguishing them from other distinct social forms as a very specific *illusio* (Bourdieu 1979 [1977]; Weber 1988 [1915-16]).

Engaging in this illusion entails being part of a coordinated process aimed at achieving certain goals according to an economic rationale. This implies organising one's own and others' behaviour according to certain values and by using specific means: it entails governing oneself and others. Governing not only implies power relations, but also raises questions as to what or who is to be governed according to which logic and by whom (Miller and Rose 1990). Hence, economic behaviour is always linked to struggles over who gets what, how, how much, and why. One of the central sites of such struggles is the firm, as Neil Fligstein has pointed out (Fligstein 1990). Organised collective interests of the management, owners and employees, as well as political agents, are constantly engaged in forging labour contracts, securing market positions, and shaping a stable regulative environment (Fligstein 2001). This not only results in formal institutions such as laws, but also in *conceptions of control* that "reflect market specific agreements between actors in firms on principles of internal organization (i.e., forms of hierarchy), tactics for competition or cooperation, and the hierarchy or status ordering of firms in a given market" and "can be thought of as 'local knowledge'" (Fligstein 1996, 658). When conceptions of control become shared perceptions used on an everyday basis and are inscribed in the way things are done, symbolic domination prevails (Bourdieu 2005). In order to understand how economic practices differ, we need to know how ideas, concepts, and techniques of economic governance actively foster, channel, and delimit economic behaviour, are accepted by others as legitimate, and thereby contribute to creating such a thing as "the economy."

Such a view stresses the importance of knowledge for economic practice and its close entanglement with power. Economic knowledge, just as any other form of knowledge, features three different properties (Schmidt 2012). First, subjective knowledge is the ability of agents to adequately participate in economic behaviour. This capability is socially and historically distinct. A trader in 14th-century Bruges knows how to exchange goods, direct payments and even insure shipments throughout the then-known world and over time, but would be lost on the floor of the *New York Stock Exchange* – just as lost as a modern-day trader hedging risks would be at the tables of the *Bourse de Bruges* (cf. Garcia-Parpet 2007 [1986]; Godechot 2016). The specific abilities needed to engage in both contexts can be reconstructed as habitual dispositions that are more often acquired on the job through practice than by explicit learning from a book.

Second, knowledge is materialised in artefacts such as charts, algorithms, and buildings. It can hence be reconstructed from the objectified forms used in and structuring economic practices as dispositives. One current-day example of such an economic dispositive is management consulting (Schmidt-Wellenburg 2013b). Consulting engagements are seen as legitimate forms of objectively assessing economic behaviour, transforming the structure and culture of firms, and legitimately laying off workers. At the same time, management consulting immunises managerial decisions against being challenged by owners, trade unions, and state agents even or especially in court.

Third, knowledge is objectified in utterances about the world and in instructions on how to handle it. Here, again, management consultancies today play a pivotal role and structure economic behaviour in a more ‘indirect’ way: consultancies have become major producers of market information, charting the world according to its economic value. They have turned into outlets of management knowledge and educational certificates, becoming central steppingstones in managerial carriers. The objectified forms of knowledge produced here can be found in diverse manuals, economic textbooks, government reports, and both management and consulting literature (Schmidt-Wellenburg 2013a).

All three aspects of knowledge are interlaced in economic practice. Together, they constitute “the economy” as part of a socio-historically specific social fact. It is this social fact that needs to be deconstructed if we want to understand how the perception of the economy as an ahistorical and differentiated area of society that everyone is able to relate to and engage in came into existence, is reproduced on an everyday basis, and functions in the workings of the division of power. This is especially true because this ahistorical presentation of “the economy” is at odds with the massive changes it underwent in recent decades, such as the change of the firm into a post-Fordist enterprise closely linked with the idea of a knowledge society (Fligstein and Shin 2007), the increasing usage of markets based on the pursuit of self-interest in addition to hierarchies based on order and command (Schmidt-Wellenburg 2009; Montagne 2013, 2014), financialisation understood as the heightened importance of financial markets and finance-based instruments of valuation (Chiapello 2015), deregulation understood as a dismantling of state-backed regulation, and privatisation understood as the state’s retreat from direct economic engagement (Crouch 2011).

In order to understand these changes, we do not only need to focus on economic practices and the practical knowledge involved. We should also take into account how the discipline of economics reflects and objectifies certain knowledge (Fourcade 2009) and we should not forget to take a closer look at how economic practice is fostered, regulated, and shaped by governmental concepts and governing practice, taking into account who profits society-wide from their practical realisation.

### 3.2 Economics as an Efficient Fallacy

In Bourdieu's view, neo-classical theory, especially in its anthropological dimension, is a particular case of scholastic fallacy. It is a theory that confuses things of logic with the logic of things, and makes ordinary economic agents reason like pure theoreticians:

Denying the pretention of economic agents to possess adequate knowledge of economic mechanisms, the academic economist claims for himself a monopoly on the total point of view and declares himself capable of transcending the partial, particular viewpoints of particular groups. (Bourdieu 1990, 28)

In this sense, Bourdieu describes neo-classical theory as an "imaginary anthropology" which oscillates between the subjectivism of "free, conscious choice" and a quasi-mechanical objectivism (because there is often only one rational solution to a problem) (Bourdieu 1990, 46-7; 2005). Similarly, it reduces markets to an idealised vision which is far removed from the social reality of empirical markets.

Bourdieu argues that Rational Action Theory's success in economics coincides with the ongoing autonomisation of the economic field, making it a partial but useful formalisation of this process. Economic agents are supposed to behave naturally as profit or utility maximisers, and markets are supposed to adjust (through variations in prices or quantities) without any institutional or social interference, as "natural processes" (Bourdieu 1990, 50). We find here the example of a belief close to the *illusio* of the economic field, which is presented as a 'pure theory' of this field in an academic fashion: founded on a scholastic bias – utilitarianism as the only basis of human anthropology – it functions to reinforce the autonomy of "the economy." The most radical neo-classicals try to generalise this economic *illusio* to the entire social reality, most of the time against the results of the other social sciences (Fine and Milonakis 2009). The appearance of some success for such a theory is due to the fact that, in some sectors of social life (for example, financial markets, the educational orientation, collective bargaining, etc.), these economic behaviours have expanded to such a degree that they can present sufficient regularity in order to be stylised without too many obvious errors of prediction: people sometimes behave 'reasonably' enough to be 'represented' as pure 'maximisers' (which they are not). Their decisions become probable from a microeconomic point of view, even if this point of view is a 'universal' or 'natural' illusion when considered from the perception of Bourdieu's general economy of practices (Bourdieu 1998).

The mathematical formalisation of economics cannot be criticised in itself, but as a way for neo-classical economists to further separate the economic logic from the social and historical conditions in which it is embedded (Simiand 1932; Fourcade 2006). The use of simple models and the practice of hypothesis testing simulate the experimental method without any chance to obtain univer-

sal conclusions, because they are not explicitly understood as historical and contextual. The simplified models of economics are most of the time very distant from the ethnographic or sociological observations of the underlying realities.

Mathematisation and formalisation in economics are certainly two practices by which research results, economic theories and worldviews are not only legitimised in the academic context, but throughout the social world. In addition to the indirect effect of consecrating certain knowledge, these practices also have a direct effect when used to evaluate the impact of policy decisions on economic and political behaviour (Marttila 2014). Academic practice is not sealed off from economic and political practice, especially since scientific discourse longs for practical recognition, needs relevant problems to investigate, and searches for funding. This also holds true for the professional socialisation of agents (Lenger 2018): engaging in academic education and being awarded certificates by academic institutions are important prerequisites to enter into certain economic and political realms as a practicing economic professional (Klüger 2018; Schneickert 2018). So, the field of economics has undergone a process of autonomisation, but it is not “an island of its own.”

Economists diagnose social problems, propose solutions, and predict future developments using social imaginaries (Beckert 2016), all the while engaging with political and bureaucratic agents mainly rooted in other realms of society. These linkages are not only channels by which economists influence society; at the same time, bureaucracy and politics structure the field of economists. The internationalisation of economics after WWII was due to the creation of global markets and, later on, deregulation by state bureaucracy that went hand-in-hand with the creation of exchange programmes and funding, also by philanthropic organisations, especially from the US (Dezalay and Garth 2002; Hesse 2012; Heredia 2018). This has not only led to new role models for academic educational institutions, such as the entrepreneurial university that has replaced the bureaucratic university, and a loss of paternalistic structures (Monneau 2018). It has also created new hierarchies produced by new methods of evaluation and a reshuffling of the reputation of disciplines in which law lost out and economics gained (Dezalay and Garth 2011; Georgakakis and Lasalle 2013).

### 3.3 Economics, State Bureaucracy, and Policy Discourse

The close link between economics (“political economy”) and politics is a characteristic of the discipline, which grew close to the political powers in order to help them accumulate wealth and power in the world system (Lebaron 2017). The two dominant traditions in post-WWII economics – neo-liberal and Keynesian – have been produced in close relationship with specific social elites (bureaucratic, political, and economic). Economics, while describing itself as “pure” and “autonomous,” never ceased being very close to decision-makers.

In this sense, the heteronomous pole has always been rather dominant in the field of economics when compared to other academic fields such as mathematics or philosophy, albeit not as heteronomous as e.g., law, history, or humanities, and its autonomy from nationally anchored bureaucratic and political fields has increased with internationalisation in recent years (Schmidt-Wellenburg 2018).

“The state” much like “the economy” only exists as an illusion, albeit a well-founded illusion deeply rooted in practices linked to established monopolies of physical and symbolic violence administered by agents located in state-bureaucratic and political fields (Bourdieu 2014). The bureaucratic field is a relatively autonomous social space where different actors compete, among other stakes, to impose a universal definition of what society and economy are all about, how they should be governed and by whom. This universal and at the same time particular kind of interest in disinterestedness was invented through a complex historical process leading to the concentration of symbolic capital, made possible by “establish(ing) a specific economic logic, founded on levies without counterpart and redistribution functioning as the basis for the conversion of economic capital into symbolic capital” (Bourdieu 1994a, 2). Economic ideas and concepts have been important stakes in these struggles right from the start, with increasing relevance in recent centuries.

Practicing economic professionals located in state-bureaucratic contexts as diverse as parliaments or central banks are involved in universalising and naturalising certain worldviews by regulating practices in specific economic and academic field contexts using state power. Laws, regulations, etc. not only *regulate* fields from the outside but *frame* them from the inside, structuring fields, relations between fields and agents rooted in these fields, as well as their ability to influence the differentiation of domination (Denord, Lagneau-Ymonet and Thine 2011; Itçaina, Roger and Smith 2016; Schmitz, Witte and Gengnagel 2017). Bourdieu gives a compelling example of the role of the State in the social construction of markets in his study of the personal housing market. The policy called “*aide à la personne*,” which in the 1970s favoured the development of personal credit in order to give people greater access to private residential property, was a way for bureaucratic agents to integrate popular and middle classes into the economic system through the access to property and fit with the overall economic policy outlook of the time and co-constructed “supply” and “demand” in this specific market (Bourdieu 2005).

It is precisely this interlinking of interests of agents located in academic fields with those located in bureaucratic, political, and economic fields on the basis of homologies of structure that work as structures of discursive potentiality that may, but do not have to, foster discursive coalitions (Schmidt-Wellenburg 2016). One development in recent years that has been thoroughly researched using field analysis is the dismantling of the welfare state and the rise of neo-liberal reasoning in many different social realms, but always in conjunction

with economists. In the case of educational policy, it can be shown that international economic experts with ties to the OECD, neo-liberal think tanks connected to government and research institutes promoting evidenced-based educational policies using random controlled trials – which came into renewed prominence in the 1990s (Jatteau 2018) – formed a coalition to promote a complete overhaul of school regulation, introducing ever more instruments of neo-liberal governance in such diverse countries as England and Sweden (Marttila 2014). A similar dynamic can be detected when looking at the symbolic struggles over the *Plan Juppé* in France in 1995 or more recent struggles over ‘necessary’ reforms to labour law and other aspects of the *modèle social* before, during, and after the global economic crisis (Duval et al. 1998; Lebaron 2013). In Germany, similar symbolic struggles unfolded over *Hartz IV* reforms and *Agenda 2010* (Eversberg 2014; Ludwig-Mayerhofer 2017), all of which were fought around much the same coalitions and gave rise to new politics of activation that now seems to dominate the public discourse on citizenship, be it on the national or European level (Lessenich 2009; Schmidt-Wellenburg 2017c).

In many of the contributions to this issue (Georgakakis and Lebaron 2018; Heredia 2018; Klüger 2018; Mudge and Vauchez 2018; Schmidt-Wellenburg 2018), state-bureaucratic fields are seen not only as important hubs of domination serving as points of consecration, but also as having undergone severe changes themselves. Not only has privatisation, as mentioned before, led to state agents’ retreat from engagement in economic production processes. It has also implanted market logics and economic efficiency criteria into state-bureaucratic contexts, for example via private-public partnerships. These can be seen as the legitimated manifestation of a rearrangement of relationships between these two historically distinct areas of social practice culminating in a new definition of the state and not in its dismantling or demission, as often argued. New ideas and techniques of governance are introduced in state contexts and used by state agents to organise society, to measure and evaluate their impact and state their influence. At the same time, these new and neoliberal forms of governance are combined with a “punitive paternalism” for all those who cannot or will not play along (Wacquant 2012). As Bourdieu argues in *La Misère du monde* (Bourdieu 1999), this has led to a shift in power between the two major camps that have been central to bureaucratic struggles since the creation of the welfare state: the “little state nobility” as the “left hand of the state” (teachers, social workers, nurses, providers of public services, etc.) has in recent years lost out in comparison to the “grand state nobility” constituting the “right hand of the state” (*grands corps, énarques*, etc.).

Transnationalisation is another trend that has changed the face of state-bureaucratic fields by pooling power on levels and according to logics beyond the nation-state (Wagner 2011). One such case is the European Union, which can be understood as a project of not only market-making, but at the same time also state-making (McNamara 2010). Such changes are tightly linked on the

one hand to diagnoses of de-democratisation, since democratic institutions are deeply rooted in the national coding of political and other fields, and on the other hand to the rise of populist and neo-nationalist politics carried out by political agents deeply rooted in national state-bureaucratic fields, invested through their formation into these contexts, and endangered as well as motivated by transnationalisation.

### 3.4 Economics and the Field of Power

Developments in the different social fields mentioned above are the direct and indirect effects of agents' engagement in differentiated practices of struggling with everyday life and with other agents. At the same time, these changes tend to become stakes in society-wide struggles over legitimate ways of accumulating and distributing power such as earnings, reputation, and authority and in the different meanings attributed to the practices that are at their base. Hence, everyday struggles not only play a role in the rise and fall of individuals, professions and disciplines, of political parties and bureaucratic organisations, of firms and enterprises. They are also linked to the overall social structure, because changes in the merits attributed to certain practices, abilities, jobs and, more generally, lifestyles are directly related to agents' life chances compared to others.

The struggles investigated in this HSR Special Issue and their interlinkages with political and economic struggles not only produce field-specific elites and a certain overall hierarchy of social elites known as the "field of power" (Bourdieu 1994b, 263-72; 2014, 311). At the same time, these struggles create the overall social structure that can be depicted as social space (Bourdieu 1984). This becomes apparent when instruments of new public management are used not only to govern the echelons of bureaucracy, but also for social benefit and educational schemes, when managerialism is not only seen as the best rationale to organise enterprises, their human resources departments and recruiting, but becomes decisive in universities and other educational institutions in the form of competence-oriented teaching, learning, and examining. One of the most striking examples may be the restructuring of labour market regulation in the last few years, be it in the US, UK, Germany, or more recently France, which has increased the precariousness of those already not equipped with the best life chances. In combination with deregulation and the integration of financial and other markets based on the idea of free trade, this has led to an overall increase in economic inequality (Piketty 2013).

So, taking a closer look at the way economists engage in redefining what economy and society at large is all about is an attempt not only to understand one academic tribe that has increased in importance in the academic context, but also an attempt to explain the genesis of some of the most powerful perceptions in and tools to govern today's society.

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## 4. Researching Economic Fields

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In order to realise the research programme laid out above, we can draw on a large set of research methodological reflections and instruments currently used in sociological investigations. After briefly outlining the basic methodological presuppositions used in field analysis (4.1), we will distinguish between various sorts of data material (4.2), qualitative analytical and interpretative tools (4.3), and finally statistical methods (4.4). With these distinctions, we only want to clarify the diversity of elements that are to be integrated in a field-theoretical perspective.

### 4.1 Practices, Games, and Reconstructing "Le Sens Pratique"

Field analysis is a relational and anti-essentialist methodology that sets out from the idea that the process of practical engagement in life presupposes and constitutes relations of meaning and power. These relations become objectified in practices discernible from other practices and embodied in the agents' habitual ability to participate in social life (Bourdieu 1990, 52-65). Thus, any of the aforementioned institutions, agents, and structures as well as their changes have to be understood and explained as products of historically specific social agents engaging in a historically specific context. Hence, the main focus is put, on the one hand, on the formation of agents and their habitus understood as collective aspects of personal dispositions and, on the other hand, on the structural distributions of power and meaning as well as of techniques, artefacts, and other objectifications.

Two basic epistemological concepts are used by field-analytical approaches to imagine processes of engaging in social life. First is the idea that the game is the basic grammar of social life (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992; Schmidt 2012). We not only learn by playing games, but the ability to participate in social practice relies on our practical sense of anticipating what is going on, enabling us to partake in social practice without causing too much of a fuss, which might be reflexively observed and even intended as a disturbance. At the same time, as with any game, social life also includes the possibility to reflect on the game and to explicitly give boundaries to the game, conditions of participation, and hence rules (Lahire 2011). This ability creates objectified knowledge of the game and opens up the opportunity for those engaged as well as those playing other games to understand the game and differences in how the game is played from different positions.

At this point, the second epistemological concept used in field analysis is already implied: the ability to introduce a rupture within practice and to reflect on practice as part of another game called science. It is a distancing from practical, everyday knowledge that is needed in order to produce other-than-everyday insights into the games under research. The advantage of pressing on



this point and making explicit the need to scientifically construct the research object lies in the degree of reflexive control one gains (Bachelard 2002). Most naturalistic or positivist approaches let this chance slip by due to their fondness for the ‘real’ and untainted perception of things. They miss that any account of social practice is always a perspectival reflection on practice that objectifies certain aspects as rules, rules that may play a decisive role in producing and changing this practice but are not the practical sense necessary to play along (Wittgenstein 1968 [1953]). Hence, a comprehensive understanding of social facts can only be obtained if we again try to bridge the methodological gap created by our epistemological curiosity by re-introducing the practical sense of engagements via the concept of games, trying to communicate to others what the knack of playing them is (Bourdieu 2000 [1997]).

The field is the concept employed to methodologically follow through with the idea of game and rupture. Engagements in social life are deconstructed (breaking with immanent and practical understanding and context) and reconstructed as the outcome of meaning and power constellations in a certain field. This involves, first of all, the need to understand and hence interpret what is at stake in a certain field, how the perceptions of these stakes and appropriate behaviour vary across different regions of the field and from other fields, and who is seen as entitled and capable of engaging in which practices. Here, it is necessary to interpret, to create condensed and “thick” descriptions of actual practices and agents (Geertz 1973). Much like Max Weber (1988 [1904]) argued in his idea of creating ideal types in order to understand social behaviour, the main focus is not on the subjective understanding a certain agent acquires, nor on understanding the ‘creator’ or ‘actor’ of certain ‘actions’ (in the singular), but on recovering the objective social sense of certain practices and agents. If practically used by the agents it will make them responsive to the forces of the field (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992).

The mode of research implicit to field-analytical work is processual by nature. Deconstructing social facts in order to understand and explain how they are produced is itself a form of knowledge generation, because it aims at reconstructing the practices involved in the processes of production, albeit one that explicitly initiates a rupture with everyday perceptions of the world and tries to gain new, more comprehensive and scientific insights. It is aimed at overcoming lopsided conceptions that either lean towards empiricism or towards scholasticism (Diaz-Bone 2007). Practical scientific work might start with either a set of theoretical propositions without which no scientific insights can be generated, or with empirical observations without which there is no irritation of accepted knowledge. At the same time, the process set into motion by either impulse is socio-historically specific and produces relatively stable albeit indexical insights that are acknowledged as scientific knowledge (Bourdieu 2004).

## 4.2 Data Material

Starting from the presupposition that exploring the practical workings of a certain area of social life such as economic practice means understanding the engagement in this context, in-depth ethnographic observation, which can be considered as a basic practice in the social sciences, is a preferred method of producing data material in field-analytic studies (for developments in economic ethnography, see Dufy and Weber 2007; for ethno-accounting, Cottureau and Marzok 2011; and for a field-theoretically inspired approach, Garcia-Parpet 2007 [1986]). It enables the production of systematic rigorous descriptions of actors, practices, and discourses situated in context, and to create the possibility for researchers to learn and make themselves acquainted with basic practical knowledge.

Starting with his work on colonial Algeria as well as rural Béarn in France and right up to the *Weight of the World*, Bourdieu has used ethnography constantly as a method not only for producing data but also for applied analysis using his own embodied senses to grasp how the meaning and constraints of social facts practically work (Wacquant 2004). Forms of data collection may be more or less participatory, more or less openly labelled as acts of scientific observation, and more or less focused on initial research interests and questions (Lueger 2000; Beaud and Weber 1997).

It is important to keep in mind that ethnography in Bourdieu's sense neither means going naïvely native nor hoping to catch the pure subjective meaning. Instead, one tries to deliberately introduce a reflexive rupture with the everyday perception of the world using one's resource of being foreign to the field, while at the same time accumulating experiences to prepare for a second rupture with one's own scholastic and sociological world perception (Hartmann 2012). If one succeeds, not only participant observation but participant objectivation is hopefully the outcome, an undertaking

to explore not the 'lived experience' of the knowing subject but the social conditions of possibility – and therefore the effects and limits – of that experience and, more precisely, of the act of objectivation itself. (Bourdieu 2003; cf. Champagne et al. 1989)

A second type of material on which we can base our analysis of economic practices and institutions is discourses in their various forms. Engagement in economic practices constantly produces discursive statements on our own economic behaviour and the economic behaviour of others in the form of evaluations and descriptions (firm reports, rankings, market reports and newspaper articles on management, macroeconomic indexes, and developments), more political and policy-conscious reports and statements by commissions, and scientific analysis and writing, such as management and political economy literature (Temmar, Angermüller and Lebaron 2013; Lebaron 2000; Schmidt-Wellenburg 2013a; Suckert 2017). In addition, we can use open narrative, semi-structured or more closed forms of interviewing to produce data on cer-

tain sequences and aspects of practice or stories about how researched events unfolded as seen and remembered by the informants, such as single or collective trajectories in the form of biographical narrations (Lenger 2018; Maesse 2015), autobiographical writing (Lebaron 2018; Georgakakis and Lebaron 2018) and narrations of how historical events such as market creation, regulation, economic crisis governance, etc., work.

Biographical data, including ties between individuals, are a third type of material that we can use, especially those derived from institutional practices of consecrating trajectories, institutionalised forms of comparing and evaluating one's own position in the field with other positions. Curricula vitae (CVs) are probably the most prominent of such practices, producing and using all the tokens that indicate different forms of capital that are of value in the field, the differences between them and, accordingly, the distances between field regions, as well as exchange rates. At the same time, writing CVs is an evaluative practice integral to many fields. It enables agents ranging from trainees to CEOs, EU bureaucrats to international jet-setting academics, to objectify their position using standard means of evaluating achievements and closely-associated legitimate ambitions that make up their careers. CVs are used in fields to measure the worth of agents, to compare and to judge their potential, often in the form of human resource management. Standard evaluative practices involving CVs include acts of hiring, applying for and obtaining jobs, and entering into competitions for research funding, grants, and prizes. CVs function as a form of synopsis of all different types of practices that are highly objectified, legitimated and worthy, in other words, the forms of capital in the field that empower those who hold them and position them in relation to others.

### 4.3 Qualitative Analytical Tools

Pierre Bourdieu's sociology is inherently comparative (Bourdieu 2003) and aimed at creating types, not as part of abstract and formal taxonomies nor as a reconstruction of some ideal that finds its expression in historical reality, but as a rational reconstruction of certain characteristics of reality along some specific dimensions in order to abstractly grasp differences and communalities between the phenomena observed (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 224-35). Such an analytical approach has much in common with the idea of interpretative hermeneutics as it has been developed in other intellectual traditions (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1983), not focussed on reconstructing individual processes of meaning production but rather objective meaning structures. Especially techniques aimed at constructing categories and relations between categories used in Grounded Theory (Corbin and Strauss 2008) have their virtues here. On the one hand, categories are created out of the collected material taking care not to squeeze it into drawers previously constructed, using the strategy of either maximising the differences between categories to chart the entire spectrum or

narrowing down the differences in order to determine the specificity of the categories. On the other hand, categories derived from the analytical framework orienting the research perspective are employed as a coding paradigm through which to organise the material, to detect ideal-typical connections of categories that build meaning clusters and to retrieve narrative logics organising the field. The outcome should not only be a coding scheme able to distinguish between different meanings and different nuances of relations that matter in a certain area of social life. It should also be able to collect the stories that go along with these categories and their interlinkages, because otherwise coding schemes either remain meaningless classification tables or – even worse – are reanimated by scholastic standard stories.

This mode of reconstructive and reflexive interpretative hermeneutics can be used to analyse observational and interview material, especially produced in the research process, as well as discursive material constantly produced in economic practices and evaluative struggles. When analysing discursive material, the aim is to uncover the regularities behind the formation of enunciations and the production of statements and their dispersion (Foucault 2002), creating meaning as relational phenomena. Different approaches concentrate on reconstructing different aspects of formation rules, such as discursive practices, resources, concepts, normative conventions and ontological presuppositions, as well as legitimate speakers (for a comprehensive overview, see Keller et al. 2001, 2003). By linking statements with speakers' field positions and making them intelligible as position-takings, the production and distribution of discursive resources and its linkage to structures of symbolic domination can be investigated (Schmidt-Wellenburg 2013a, 337-60). It is in a similar vein that one can speak of a political economy of discourse that structures the dominant representation of economy and society (Longuet and Pereira 2015).

The analysis of discursive practices can also be more deeply rooted in linguistics (or the “science of languages”), as it is the case in the French Discourse Analysis tradition derived from Michel Foucault and Michel Pêcheux (among others, see Charaudeau and Maingueneau 2002). In this tradition, the various lexical, syntactic, and pragmatic properties of discourses of all sorts are analysed simultaneously as components of enunciation practices, which are defined as complex social-linguistic practices. These are inserted into particular social or institutional contexts, and are strongly framed by *discursive genres*. Attention to definition struggles is only one part of a general investigation of discursive strategies that relate to the positions and dispositions of agents (hence the need for a “socio-discursive approach” as promoted in Guilbert and Lebaron 2017).

#### 4.4 Statistical Techniques and Methodologies

Most of the data material collected to investigate fields can be analysed using statistical techniques that are equipped to detect relations between different types of variables and categories, discern major differences in the data from minor differences and, last but not least, explore, including from a visual point of view, the variations between individuals. Whereas the *qualitative* methods just introduced are more useful in constructing categories and observing the logic of engaging in practices, the methods we turn to now are able to take into account the interrelations between variables and categories, in particular sets of individuals, much better than other instruments, complementing the interpreting human mind that quickly reaches the end of its capacities. All the same, sociological interpretation is needed to make sense of the results regardless of the techniques used.

Bourdieu, in order to escape the reductionist quantification (also used in economics), has intensively used GDA methods, which rest on a simple epistemological principal: the model follows the data, not the reverse (c.f. Benzécri 1973). GDA as developed by Benzécri and his school (Le Roux and Rouanet 2010) allows researchers to explore the entire system of inter-relations between many variables and categories in a data table and, simultaneously, reveal the *proximities* and distances between statistical individuals (which can be persons, enterprises in a market, etc.) without presupposing any strong relation between two or three variables. Correspondence analysis (CA), principle component analysis (PCA), multiple correspondence analysis (MCA) and its related methods like class-specific analysis (CSA), all in combination with clustering methods based on the geometric spaces previously constructed, allow for a reduction of the multidimensional spaces created by interlinkages between categories to those dimensions with the least loss of information. As Bourdieu said of CA, it is especially fruitful,

because it is essentially a relational procedure whose philosophy fully expresses what in my view constitutes social reality. It is a procedure that ‘thinks’ in relations, as I try to do it with the concept of field. (Bourdieu, Chamboredon and Passeron 1991 [1968], 277)

Aside from describing the structures of one field, GDA can also be used to show structural homologies between fields and determine empirically the relative autonomy of fields from one another (Lebaron and Bonnet 2018). In all instances, one has to keep in mind “that statics doesn’t explain anything, but gives some possible elements of explanation” (Lebaron 2012, 88) that then have to be combined into an interpretative practice where statistical and sociological reasoning are intertwined. Statistical results allow researchers to position individuals in a field and to detect properties that are of importance in order to construct this field. More qualitative results allow them to describe individuals’ dispositions to the field, their practical reasoning when engaging in

field-specific practices and the historical and social genesis of these traits. Hence, field research is not a linear-procedural process, but much more an iterative fitting process drawing on both statistical and sociological reasoning, *qualitative* and *quantitative* methods, and insights into individual and collective processes of formation. In the particular case of lexicometrics, individuals can be texts, but also authors, and the relation between the variations of lexical or syntactical forms can thus be associated with variations in the contexts and the characteristics of the speakers (cf. Guilbert 2015; Lebaron 2015).

In this general perspective, one should not oppose different statistical methods, such as GDA or network analysis and the generalised linear model. First, the usefulness of geometry is not limited to GDA methods, where it is central, but it can be extended to network analysis (Denord 2015) and regression techniques (see especially Rouanet et al. 2002). In the case of network analysis, different authors have developed attempts to directly visualise networks inside the multidimensional space constructed through GDA, for example by projecting indices or other results from network analysis into this space. A methodological reflection has emerged around this issue, which allows researchers, from a theoretical point of view, to think of social capital as embedded in dynamic, multidimensional social spaces (de Nooy 2003; Denord 2015). The generalised linear model (or the family of regression methods as they are currently defined and presented) can be used in a way which makes it actually very close to GDA, and especially to the use of the technique of supplementary elements (interpretable as dependent variables, whereas the dimensions produced by GDA techniques can in some cases be described as a summary and a simplification of a set of independent variables). This fact is rarely obvious for users, who perceive these methods essentially as validation techniques or algorithms, mobilising exclusively inferential procedures such as significance tests, and not as methods designed for fitting data by a particular statistical object (a representation close to the generic idea of summarising the data on a set of dimensions: see, in particular, Le Roux 2014, 71-96).

Second, it is easy, if not in some cases mathematically direct, to relate or connect the results obtained using one technique to the results obtained using another technique (Rouanet et al. 2002). We tend to think of this relation as an integration of various statistical results into the framework of a field or social space as operationalised through GDA, but other perspectives are possible. It is obvious that any information on individuals obtained through the use of another type of statistical technique can easily be visualised in the cloud of individuals, especially when it allows the production of clusters, as what has been called a *structuring factor* (Le Roux and Rouanet 2004). Third, and probably most importantly, at the level of sociological interpretation, all results should be theoretically integrated and made consistent within the interpretative framework.

The distinction between mathematical algorithms, statistical interpretation, and sociological interpretation can finally help us to summarise the use of

statistical tools in a general field-theoretical framework as a more formalised and explicit step (not understood within a linear-procedural conception) in the analysis, allowing us to methodically integrate the resources of formalisation and quantification into a more general interpretative construction.

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## 5. Conclusion: Current Research on Economists, Politics, and Societies

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Field-analysis, when used as an epistemological tool, maintains a strong connection with the research interests motivating the research process. Hence, fields reconstructed always carry an imprint of the initial research questions, something that should be kept in mind to avoid tendencies towards naturalising and reifying these reconstructions: when talking about “the field of economists” or “the economic field,” one is actually talking about specific fields in conjunction with certain sociological as well as historical and institutional settings. This is the reason why the different contributions to this volume do not add up to one description of the field of economists and its influence on other social fields and spaces. Quite the contrary – at first glance, the contributions show how economists’ practices and their interlinkages with other social realms vary over time and space in their specific national and local contexts. But, with a closer look it becomes apparent that analogous mechanisms can be found operating in rather different settings, structuring economists’ fields and their interlinkages with economic and state-bureaucratic contexts. As the essays show, uncovering these mechanisms becomes easier in times of crisis, when hopes and fears are voiced more eagerly and the stakes agents have in fields come to the fore. Phenomena analysed in the contributions to this special issue can be subsumed under four main headlines: changes in the formation of economists, transformation of the structure of the field of economics, the effects of these shifts on political and bureaucratic fields and, more generally, linkages to the field of power. In this last part of our introductory essay, we will try to give a systematic overview of the theoretical insights gained from the contributions, hoping that they will be used for further research.

The first set of essays has a common interest in struggles over practices of teaching and forming “economists,” be it as professionals or academics. In recent years, a new surge of internationalisation of nationally anchored economic formation has taken place that is at the same time closely linked to strategic attempts to increase the field’s autonomy from historical nation-state dependencies by forging new links to transnational academic institutions rooted in the US-American context. Such changes are argued using a rhetoric of scientific excellence, progress, and global competition and open up new power sources agents use to create and refurbish their positions on local and national levels with global effects: the proliferation of transnationalised US-American

economics' standards. How such shifts impact the formation of German economists is discussed by *Alexander Lenger* (2018) in his contribution. He uses qualitative techniques to reconstruct career trajectories and to identify the main formative practices within the German field of economics, in order to arrive at a comprehensive theory of academic economists' socialisation. Focusing not so much on career trajectories but on the curricula, degree denomination and content, *Emmanuel Monneau* (2018) traces the changes French economics' programmes have undergone. His contribution is based on the analysis of a dataset encompassing all economics-related programmes offered by French tertiary educational institutions from 1970 to 2009 using MCA and ascending hierarchical clustering (AHC). Monneau shows that, to the detriment of research-oriented teaching, French economics degrees have become increasingly heteronomic, critical economics has been marginalised, and professional schools are today perceived as the 'gold standard.' Focusing not on teaching but on a single research institution, *Arthur Jatteau* shows how one laboratory – Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL) located at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology – managed to become dominant not only in the application of a certain methodology – randomised controlled trials (RCTs) – but also in consulting governments on development and other policies. Using historical reconstruction and the analysis of a full database of all J-PAL affiliates, it becomes possible to identify different groups of agents and the strategies they use to push for international academic excellence and succeed.

The second set of contributions concentrates on different facets of internationalisation that occur in graduate education, institutions of evaluation, and the distribution of funds and prestige, but also of personnel, research programmes, and ideas. As *Jens Maesse* (2018) points out in his essay, these developments are triggered by the worldwide adoption of transnational standards, but they take effect at the local and global levels simultaneously, not necessarily creating one unified global or international field but cutting linkages to nation-state institutions and creating new linkages to transnational institutions. Maesse argues that the transnational field of economics should be understood as a dispositive, creating different economics cultures and economists with different aspects of transnationality in different locally, nationally, and regionally anchored academic practices. *Christian Schmidt-Wellenburg* (2018) argues along the same line and emphasises that internationalised economists differ quite considerably due to their relationships with nationally anchored colleagues. Transnational linkage or national anchorage of economists' positions is one of the major cleavages in fields of economists today. Using a prosopographical approach, Schmidt-Wellenburg shows that German academic economists' perception of the European economic crisis is directly linked to their positions within the discipline, their carriers, and their proximity to either national political power or internationalised economics institutions. This trend of transnationalisation is confirmed by the findings on Swiss academic economics and busi-



ness studies presented by *Thierry Rossier* and *Felix Bühlmann* (2018) using linear models to investigate a dataset comprising all Swiss professors of these disciplines for the benchmarks 1957, 1980, and 2000.

The third set of contributions is interested in how economy and society are problematised and the European crisis is construed within European bureaucratic fields. *Didier Georgakakis* and *Frédéric Lebaron* (2018) focus on one short period in the history of the European economic crisis that nicely captures how neo-liberal political thought dominates economic policies until today. They investigate why the brief excursion of Yanis Varoufakis into European politics ended in utter failure. Using both an MCA run on a database of 311 major European economic governance experts and an MCA run on the personnel mentioned in Varoufakis' book *The Global Minotaur*, they are able to contrast Varoufakis' perception of the world of European economic policy with the Eurocrats' perception and illuminate basic misunderstandings. The astonishing persistence of economists' methodologies and basic political concepts in times of existential crisis is also at the heart of *Stephanie Mudge* and *Antoine Vauchez*'s research on the European Central Bank (ECB). Their interest lies in the creation and legitimation of the ECB's most popular and influential Smets-Wouters model, the first to perform Europe as a single macroeconomic unit and desperately needed for forecasting and policy-making on a European level, although it does not take into account financial markets – a real disadvantage at the start of the European crisis. Using historical reconstruction, archival work, and expert interviews, Mudge and Vauchez are able to show that the model's unique selling point of performing Europe leads to the European political and bureaucratic field's heavy reliance on it. This position enables the ECB to defend and fortify the niche they had created for themselves in the world of international monetary policy even in times of crisis and to expand their influence further.

The last set of contributions focuses on the more or less subtle linkages between the field of economists and the field of power. *Elisa Klüger* (2018) concentrates on the *Brazilian National Economic and Social Development Bank* to show how struggles in the field of power and the academic field shape policies of this state bank and, hence, the Brazilian economy as a whole. The Bank becomes a fighting ground not only for neoliberal versus developmentalist policies, but also for different academic and elite fractions. MCA and network analysis are used to map out the manifest and latent relationships between agents and to understand the struggles over problems and potential solutions as well as over who is to govern Brazil. *Mariana Heredia* (2018) takes a broader view to discuss how the establishment of strong links between Argentinian and US-American economics has led to its heteronomisation and not autonomisation. Drawing on historical reconstruction, archival material, and many interviews, she argues that academic capital gained in the US context is used back home to foster consulting and political careers – not a career in academia. This

seems to be contrary to what has been observed in other countries such as Germany and France, and Heredia attributes this to the institutional set-up of Argentinian economics. The role economics degrees and education plays for elites is also at the centre of *Christian Schneickert's* (2018) comparative investigation of German, US, Brazilian, and Indian national fields of power. Schneickert uses a prosopographic dataset of political and economic elites to investigate the role economists play in different national settings compared to other professions such as law and the military. He argues that emerging powers from the 'Global South' seem to establish their own 'schools of power' for the educational reproduction of their national elites. Therefore, to speak of an homogenous global elite is misleading and obscures the multiple conflicts between elite factions in national fields of power, as well as between national elites from different countries and world regions, again pointing to the multiplicity of processes of transnationalisation.

All the contributions highlight that no one unified economy exists, nor one internationalised economics. Instead, they argue for a multidimensional and relational analysis of how different economic practices, economists and forms of economic knowledge are produced and 'embedded' in other, especially academic and bureaucratic, social practices and fields. This issue illustrates the existence of a lively and 'strong' research programme in a field-theoretically oriented sociology of economists and economic practices that draws its strength from a specific Durkheimian legacy that has, under the seminal influence of Bourdieu, been fused with a set of complementary methodological tools allowing for an in-depth investigation of major social changes of our time.

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# Historical Social Research

## Historische Sozialforschung

### All articles published in HSR Special Issue 43 (2018) 3: Economists, Politics, and Society.

Christian Schmidt-Wellenburg & Frédéric Lebaron

There Is No Such Thing as "the Economy". Economic Phenomena Analysed from a Field-Theoretical Perspective.

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